

**How Cabinet Secretaries Can Help With Management Of Cabinet  
Meetings**

**By**

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**Presented At**

**The Cabinet Secretaries Government Network Workshop, Hilton Hotel,  
Addis Ababa**

**February 01-08, 2014**

**1.0 Introduction**

1.1 Theories on administrative reforms hold out that every performance in an organizational setting can be improved. The role of the Secretary To The Cabinet and the Cabinet Secretariat cannot be an exception. It is therefore essential and advantageous to constantly look for opportunities to improve the performance of Secretaries To The Cabinet. Such improvements can be made observable only when they are placed against specific standards. The challenge faced in this regard has to do with the diversity of traditions and practices that necessarily

prevail in various jurisdictions in which a Secretary To The Cabinet is performing. It would appear, in the circumstances, that, one would have to focus on the form and processes of the work of Cabinet Secretaries rather than the content of the work they do as the work of a Cabinet Secretary is secret.

1.2 The objective of this specific contribution to this Workshop is therefore only to raise awareness of the value of Cabinet Secretaries helping members of Cabinet through pertinent interventions when Cabinet meetings are in session, as one way of improving performance.

The gist of the presentation is that Secretaries To The Cabinet must be on the lookout for opportunities to intervene to save the situation when necessary. It is also recommended that Secretaries To The Cabinet must do all they can to have functioning Inter-ministerial Committees of Permanent Secretary, (Chief Director, in the case of Ghana), to preview draft Cabinet Memoranda before they are submitted.

1.3 The paper is presented in six(6) parts, namely;

a) Introduction

b) The Role of the Secretary To The Cabinet And Its Implications

c) Theoretical Framework :

(i) Public Policy Making As A Foremost Frame Of Reference

(ii) Evidence Informed Decision-making As A Second Frame Of Reference

d) The Secretary To The Cabinet As a Leader From Below

e) Examples of Interventions By The Secretary To The Cabinet

f) Concluding Remarks

## **2.0. The Role of the Secretary To The Cabinet And Its Implications**

2.1 Universally, Cabinet Secretaries can be perceived as having the singular responsibility of assisting members of Cabinet to, in turn, assist the heads of governments to determine the general policies of government, and implement the policies so determined.

2.2 Usually, Cabinet Memorandum Writing Manuals guide the preparation of Cabinet Memoranda and Cabinet Information Papers. Where policy and programme proponents are faithful in adhering to standards and procedures, there is the likelihood that Cabinet Memoranda will serve their purposes, receive approvals, get implemented and solve the problems aimed at.

2.3 This is especially so if a sieving mechanism such as an Inter-ministerial Committee of Permanent Secretaries(Chief Directors) exists, and conscientiously discharges its responsibility of scrutinizing Draft Cabinet memoranda and advising on how they can be improved before submission to the Cabinet Secretariat.

2.4 If however, in spite of pre-Cabinet discussion steps, some Cabinet Memoranda, that need strengthening, find their way into Cabinet meetings, the Secretary To The Cabinet should step in to assist with the management of such an eventuality, even during the Cabinet meeting.

2.5 In doing so, three conditions have to pertain. The first is that a trust relationship has to exist between the Cabinet Secretary and the political leaders he is working for. Secondly, the Cabinet Secretary has to be perceived as competent and hence capable of effectively advising the meeting. Thirdly, he should have exhibited beyond dispute a servant attitude and indeed sufficient loyalty and commitment to, at all times, see to the success of the political leadership he is working for.

2.6 In essence, the three qualities should have led to the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the Cabinet Secretary and the political leadership. The symbiotic relationship actually should imply an acknowledgement of interdependence between the Secretary To The Cabinet and, through him, generally, top leadership of the public services and the political leadership.

### **3.0 Theoretical Framework**

The competence of the Cabinet Secretary must be derived, especially, from his knowledge, attitudes and skills in public policymaking.

However, as this workshop is discussing evidence informed contributions to Cabinet decision making, one could add some to the framework used daily by a Secretary To The Cabinet in discharging his responsibilities.

Indeed, when juxtaposed, it will be appreciated that evidence informed decision making is really a derivative of public policymaking.

Hence, it can be said that an effective and efficient Secretary To the Cabinet must use the two frameworks as his constant frame of reference for his work.

### **3.1 Public Policy Making As A Foremost Frame Of Reference**

A Classical definition of public policymaking states that;

“Public policy making is a very complex dynamic process whose various components make different contributions to it. It decides major guidelines for action directed at the future mainly by governmental organs. These guidelines (policies) formally aim at achieving what is in the public interest by the best possible means.”

(Y. Dror “Public Policy Making Re-examined” 1968. P.12)

This definition is the most comprehensive drawing attention to the essential characteristics of public policymaking, that, it is very complex, dynamic, a process, directive, future oriented, uses governmental authority, seeks public interest at optimal cost. The foregoing actually implies that a public policy is complete only when it has resources allocated for its implementation, that is, by the best possible means.

The organization of public policy making is highly structured and procedural.

The process comprises:

- a) Problem analysis - identification, definition and specification
- b) Formulation – specifying steps to be taken to resolve the problem including resource requirements

- c) Adoption - securing of agreement and support for implementing the decision formulated
- d) Implementation - communicating steps to be taken by whom, when, where and how
- e) Monitoring - ascertaining whether the prescribed plans were being complied with
- f) Evaluation - ascertaining, upon completion of implementation that the desired result has/have been attained.
- g) Reformulation - Restart of the cycle where implementation of a decision missed solving the problem identified.

### **3.2 Evidence Informed Decision-making As A Second Frame Of Reference**

Bearing in mind that evidence informed processes for generating information for improving Cabinet decision making requires a systematic and rational approach to conducting research, and analyzing available evidence, a Secretary To The Cabinet must conscientiously acquire and constantly use evidence informed decision making knowledge, attitudes and skills as an expanded appreciation of public policymaking.

Thus equipped, he leads his Cabinet Secretariat, to;

- a) understand the problem to be solved with the public policy entailed in a Cabinet Memorandum,
- b) appreciate options of solutions to choose from,

- c) appreciate the choice that gives the best assurance that money applied will yield good value,
- d) appreciate that adequate stakeholder acceptance of this option has been assured,
- e) ascertain that government accountability has been assured,
- f) ascertain possible risks and eventualities and how these can be managed, if necessary,
- g) monitor, evaluate, and where necessary, restart the process to ensure that the problem identified has been resolved.

3.3 Where the knowledge, attitudes and skills of a Secretary To The Cabinet are comprehensive and reflect the ability to use the two frameworks described above he will be sufficiently confident and well inclined to placing his total experience at the disposal of Cabinet, in session, and help the latter to function effectively and efficiently. He will be inclined to be, in reality, a helmsman /catalyst / craftsman leading from below.

#### **4.0 The Secretary To The Cabinet As a Leader From Below**

4.1 Ab initio, it is the essence of the job of a Secretary To The Cabinet to seek to "lead" from below using his presumed knowledge, attitudes and skills.

The Secretary To the Cabinet, however, should not appear presumptuous. He must not give any signs of looking down on Ministers. Instead, he should be able to get along with the Members of Cabinet.

He should exhibit in all ways possible his desire to be of assistance in processing Cabinet Memoranda into public policies and following up the implementation as well as assessing the impact of the said public policies.

## **5.0 Examples of Interventions By The Secretary To The Cabinet**

Given that The Secretary To The Cabinet would have closely studied the Cabinet Memoranda, he could intervene in a Cabinet meeting whenever he sensed that a good Memorandum, that could bring about a good public policy, is about to be “killed”.

He should send a note to H.E. The President, as chair of the meeting, most humbly suggesting what could be done. He could on the other hand send the Minister concerned a polite note suggesting a step to take.

5.1 To minimize recurrence of such difficulties it is necessary to discourage last minute submission of Cabinet Memoranda as the Cabinet Secretaries would be unable to study them to be of help to the Minister.

5.2 Additionally, the Cabinet Secretary needs to be pro-active in calling Ministers regularly to find out if they have Cabinet Memoranda coming to him, and if so to encourage them to submit them early.

5.3 The Secretary To the Cabinet could do well to ensure that an Interministerial Committee of Permanent Secretaries/Chief Directors exists to preview Cabinet Memoranda before they are brought to the Cabinet Secretariat.



5.4 Finally, in order to ensure that adequate time is available and spent discussing Cabinet Memoranda effectively, the Secretary To The Cabinet must find ways of influencing the frequent organization of Cabinet meetings.

## 6.0 **Concluding Remarks**

With the foregoing, it can be appreciated that the Secretary To The Cabinet can make considerable difference to the effective and efficient organization of Cabinet meetings as well as the management of the Cabinet in session, when the occasion demands it.

That will however depend on him being trusted by the Head of Government, as Chairman at Cabinet meetings, as well as and the Cabinet Ministers.

The trust, however, will have had to be evidenced by the way he is adjudged to have been of help in the pursuit of previous successes of the political leadership.